



## **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

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Future Fisheries Improvement Program  
c/o Mark Lere  
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Helena, MT 59620-0701

### **RE: Trout Unlimited Funding Request for upper Ninemile Creek Mine Reclamation Work**

Dear Panel Members:

This letter is written in support of Trout Unlimited's application for mine reclamation and stream habitat improvement funds in the upper Ninemile Creek drainage near Missoula. Specifically, funds are requested for implementation work on the Sawpit Creek and Kennedy Creek projects in upper Ninemile Creek. Missoula County and the Lolo National Forest are the primary partners on these projects.

Ninemile Creek is a very important tributary for the middle Clark Fork fishery and contributes to native fish conservation. This drainage supports many populations of native westslope cutthroat trout (MT Species of Concern) in tributary reaches and historically supported a viable bull trout population (Federally Threatened). Ninemile Creek also supports some of the largest rainbow and brown trout runs in the region, which provide recruitment to the Clark Fork fishery near Missoula (>40,000 angler-days per year in 2001-2011). Healthy tributaries are a key to the productivity and continued recovery of this system. The proposed projects are located on important stream segments near the headwaters of the watershed. The project reaches contain westslope cutthroat trout with high genetic purity and brook trout.

The Ninemile Creek drainage has experienced extensive mining impacts over the past century. The proposed projects address priority mine reclamation sites identified in the Ninemile TMDL process and build upon recently completed and planned reclamation work in Eustache, Little McCormick, Mattie V, and Twin Creeks by project partners. All of these similar, large projects were implemented successfully and have been closely monitored upon completion. Results have been impressive.

I strongly recommend granting funds for these projects for several reasons: 1) these sites are recognized as high priority reclamation sites, 2) project partners have demonstrated their commitment in following through with high quality work on the ground, and 3) funds requested are a small proportion of the total project cost. Please give strong consideration to these proposals and feel free to call me with questions at 542-5506.

Sincerely,

Ladd Knotek  
Fisheries Biologist